

THE RONI: TO BE OR NOT TO BE

ISSUE:

1. to determine whether the RONI could be of sufficient value to the Intelligence Community to warrant the expenditure of PAID resources necessary to support future publication(s).

BACKGROUND:

2. In late 1974, the Product Review Division (now PAID) began conducting a systematic program to review and analyze finished national intelligence products (e.g., NID, DIN, SIGINT Summary, DIE, NIE, etc.). The vehicle established to present PRD's findings was the Review of National Intelligence (RONI). Its purpose was to present PRD's findings to a larger Community-wide audience and to do so on a regular, systematic, and timely basis. The fundamental purpose was to provide the kind of critical appreciation of the Community's performance which would provide self-awareness, stimulate positive responses, and in general encourage all concerned to seek improvements in that performance.

3. Using these guidelines, the first RONI was published in February 1975 and a second in June 1975. As with any new publication, there were growing pains, but it was blessed by the old USIB and generally considered a worthwhile endeavor (though this feeling was not unanimous).

4. Publication of the third edition of the RONI was deferred because of Community apprehensions about the activities of the House Select Committee on Intelligence--which publicly revealed intelligence failures noted in the RONI and IC Staff Post-Mortems.

5. In December 1975 the C/PRD initiated attempts to "resurrect" the RONI--but in a somewhat different form. The new RONI was to be more responsive to the DCI's interests, broader in scope, open to more contributors, and slanted more toward the concerns of Community consumers. It would place less emphasis on current intelligence, statistical breakdowns, and individual regional and topical commentaries. It was to be more of an IC Staff (vice PAID) publication. The D/DCI/IC (Lt. Gen. Wilson) and AD/DCI/IC (Hank Knoche) approved the new concept and gave the "green light" for another RONI but expressed concern over the amount of time PAID staffers had to give to producing the RONI--time taken away from other priorities.

6. Preparations for the third and last edition of the RONI were time consuming and plagued with many delays, but a RONI was published in August 1976. For several reasons, the most important being manpower constraints, the D/OPEI, made the decision to terminate issuance of the RONI, and this was so stated in the publication of August 1976. As reflected in responses commenting on the content, this edition of the RONI was well received by the IC, partly because of its non-controversial content.

DISCUSSION:

7. Prior to addressing what value the RONI may have within the IC, the question of what the RONI should not be needs consideration, namely, the RONI should not be used:

--As a vehicle to assess the adequacy/inadequacy of national intelligence products/activities involving only one Community element. Assessments of this sort, which are often generated to initiate corrective actions, would not serve a constructive purpose if "washed" before the entire Community. Indeed, such exposures

could be unnecessarily counterproductive because institutional hackles would inevitably be raised, bureaucratic trenches built, and a lot of otherwise useful counter-battery staff time expended.

--As a vehicle to provide macro-assessments relating to the adequacy/inadequacy of national intelligence products/activities involving all (or most) Community elements. Such assessments would, rather, be prime candidates for inclusion in the Semi-annual NSC Intelligence Review. Treatment of topics of major importance, when "washed" before the entire Community, would have a constructive purpose: improvements.

--As simply a journal containing articles of an intelligence nature prepared by contributors from the various Community elements. While a journal-like approach might demonstrate the ICS leadership role as the Community spokesman, the real pay off in terms of improving Community performance would be subordinate and the editorial/review effort by the PAID Staff disproportionately high. Moreover, a journal of this sort may become a competitor with other agency publications, such as NSA's or CIA's "Studies in Intelligence."

8. On the other hand, whatever the RONI should be, or do, as an ICS/OPEI/PAID activity, it must fulfill a legitimate function leading to:

--the serious evaluation of the quality, timeliness, usefulness and adequacy of the IC substantive intelligence performance; and,

--proposals to improve national intelligence products.

9. When judged by the criteria set forth in both paras 7 and 8 above, the earlier three editions of the RONI seem imperfect models to use for future RONI publications.

10. A RONI-like function could be served by a publication that would demonstrate and assert the DCI's leadership role and bring to the attention of the Intelligence Community:

--Highly selective items of general interest related to recently completed, on-going and proposed intelligence activities. This would, in effect, be an IC activities report. (See I. "Matters of General Interest" in the August 1976 RONI)

--Substantive articles which would by design:

- o Informally serve an evaluative function to improve performance by proposing solutions. It would be essential to require a response from those agencies critiqued as to what corrective actions had been/should be taken in light of the recommendations.

- o Consist of contributions of all elements of the IC (CIA, DIA, NSA, etc.)

- o Be published periodically (perhaps quarterly)

- o Serve to expose constructive viewpoints which might otherwise be suppressed due to contrary official departmental or agency positions

- o Not exceed a SECRET level classification in order to gain wide reader exposure.

11. Manpower requirements involved in producing a RONI could easily cost PAID up to one-half man year, depending on the frequency of publication and other variables. This estimate is for editorial tasks and is exclusive of substantive contributions by other PAID, OPEI, or ICS members. Any decision to go with a new publication~~/~~ should have a full appreciation of this manpower cost.

CONCLUSION:

12. Except for the modified, manpower intensive proposal outlined in para. 10, the potential value of RONI as a vehicle to improve IC performance is extremely limited.